



# High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)

## Your Guide to the HSPA

2003

**T**his pamphlet answers the most frequently asked questions about the new eleventh-grade graduation test, the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), and provides information about its importance to your child's education. This information explains what the HSPA measures, why the assessment is given, how the results are reported, and why it is important for your child to do well on the assessment.

### Questions and Answers

#### 1. What is the HSPA?

The HSPA is a state test given to students in the eleventh grade to measure whether they have gained the knowledge and skills identified in the Core Curriculum Content Standards. These standards, adopted by the State Board of Education, identify what students should know and be able to do at the end of the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. The HSPA replaces the Grade 11 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT11), which was administered from 1993 to 2001. The HSPA will help determine whether your child is making satisfactory progress toward mastering the skills he or she will need to graduate from high school. Students who enter the eleventh grade on or after September 1, 2001, must pass the HSPA as a graduation requirement. The HSPA measures eleventh-grade achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards. In March 2003, all first-time eleventh-grade students will take the HSPA and receive scores in Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy.

#### 2. Why is my child required to pass the HSPA?

In 1988, the New Jersey State Legislature passed a law (18A: 7C-6.2) that requires all students who graduate from a public high school in New Jersey to demonstrate mastery of skills "...needed to function politically, economically, and socially in a

democratic society." These skills are defined in the Core Curriculum Content Standards in the areas of Mathematics, Language Arts Literacy, Science, Visual and Performing Arts, Social Studies, Health and Physical Education, World Languages, and Workplace Readiness.

#### 3. Are children classified as special education required to take the HSPA?

The HSPA is designed to give your school information about how well all students have mastered the Core Curriculum Content Standards, including students with educational disabilities. Special education students will be working toward achieving the standards at levels appropriate for them and with any accommodations they may need. These accommodations are defined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The accommodations should be the same as those used by these students in other classroom testing, and may include Braille, extended testing time, or a different testing site.

Every student with disabilities must take each content area of the HSPA unless exempted by the IEP because the disability is so severe that the student has not been instructed in the knowledge and skills tested and cannot complete any of the item types on the test. Parents of children with disabilities should discuss participation in the HSPA, and any necessary accommodations, at the child's IEP meeting.

While most special education students will participate in the HSPA testing, there is a small percentage of students with the most severe disabilities for whom some of the content standards are not appropriate. The New Jersey Department of Education has identified those standards that are appropriate for students with severe disabilities. The department recently developed a different kind of test to measure the achievements of special education students who are exempt from taking the HSPA. The new test, the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA), was administered for the first time in November 2001. The portfolio assessment will document student performance in Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics.

**4. Are students identified as limited English proficient (LEP) required to take the HSPA?**

A few limited English proficient (LEP) students may not be able to take the test and may be eligible to be exempted. Other LEP students may need accommodations during testing, which can include a translation dictionary, translation of test directions, extended testing time, or a small group testing environment. Parents should meet with the school bilingual/ESL coordinator to discuss appropriate testing accommodations for LEP students.

**5. When is the HSPA given?**

In March 2003, the HSPA will be administered to all first-time eleventh grade students. Students who do not pass both sections of the test will be able to retake the test in October 2003, and again in March of subsequent years, if necessary. Students must retake only those sections not yet passed. Your child will spend approximately two hours each day taking the HSPA.

**HSPA TEST SCHEDULES FOR 2003**

**March 2003**

**Regular Test Dates**

**March 4, 5, and 6, 2003**

**Make-up Test Dates**

**March 11, 12, and 13, 2003**

**October 2003**

**Regular Test Dates**

**October 7, 8, and 9, 2003**

**Make-up Test Dates**

**October 14, 15, and 16, 2003**

**6. What does the HSPA measure?**

The March 2003 HSPA measures achievement of eleventh-grade knowledge and skills in the areas of Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy.

**Mathematics**

The Mathematics Section will be administered on March 4, 2003. This section requires students to solve problems of basic mathematics, algebra, and geometry. The Mathematics Section contains two types of questions. Most questions are multiple choice; students select the correct answer from four choices. Other questions are open-ended and are scored by trained mathematicians. Students are required to write their own answers or to explain or illustrate how they solve mathematical problems. The Mathematics Section tests student knowledge of the following skills:

- Number Sense, Concepts, and Applications
- Spatial Sense and Geometry
- Data Analysis, Probability, Statistics, and Discrete Mathematics
- Patterns, Functions, and Algebra

**Language Arts Literacy**

On March 5 and 6, 2003, students will take the Language Arts Literacy Section of the test. The reading component requires students to read passages and to answer related questions about each passage. Most of the test questions are multiple-choice; however, some questions require students to provide written responses using their own words, usually in the form of written paragraphs. These questions are referred to as "open-ended" questions and are scored by highly trained readers.

Reading passages test comprehension, both literal and inferential. Literal comprehension is the ability to understand the actual meaning of written words. Inferential comprehension is the ability to use careful reasoning to extend understanding of the communication beyond the literal meaning of the words themselves. Questions are based on those skills that critical readers use to understand, analyze, and evaluate text.

The writing component requires students to respond to two writing prompts. One prompt presents a photograph and requires students to create a story based on features or elements of the photo. The other prompt provides a topic and requires students to write a persuasive essay based on that topic. These two tasks measure your child's ability to construct meaning in sustained written responses.

The writing prompts used on the HSPA were carefully screened and pretested to assure that they are fair and interesting and that they will not offend students. Both teachers and parents participated in these screenings.

### **7. How is the HSPA developed?**

Test passages and items for the HSPA are developed and reviewed by state-level committees for Mathematics, Language Arts, and Sensitivity before and after they are included in the test. New Jersey teachers and other educators participated in the committee review process, as did parents. All test passages and items were subjected to a rigorous field test before they were included on the graduation test.

### **8. How were the proficiency levels set for each test section?**

Proficiency levels for the Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy Sections of the HSPA were established after the March 2002 administration of the test. Using student performance information from the March 2002 administration of the test, committees of experienced educators recommended proficiency levels for each of the test sections. With the committees' recommendations, the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, adopted the standards which established the proficiency levels. A procedure called statistical equating was used to make sure that all future HSPA tests are at the same level of difficulty as the tests administered for the first time in March 2002.

### **9. How is the HSPA scored?**

The multiple-choice questions are machine-scored by a company hired by the New Jersey Department of Education. The scoring company also conducts the scoring of all open-ended items including the

written responses in Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy. The company has a staff of scorers who undergo extensive training and continuous monitoring during the scoring process.

Each correct response to a multiple-choice question counts as one point. The total number of points make up a score known as the raw score. The raw scores are then converted into scaled scores, which are the scores that are reported for students in Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy. This scaled score is your child's HSPA score. Students are not penalized for guessing.

### **10. How are the open-ended questions scored?**

Each open-ended question in the Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy sections is scored by two independent, trained readers using a scale that ranges from 0 to 3 in Mathematics and 0 to 4 in Language Arts Literacy. The student's scores on the multiple-choice and open-ended questions are combined to get the total scores for Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy.

### **11. How are the essays scored?**

Essays in the Language Arts Literacy Section are scored using a method developed by the New Jersey Department of Education called Registered Holistic Scoring. The essays are rated on a six-point scale from 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). They are judged on four features of writing: organization/content, usage, sentence construction, and mechanics. Each essay is judged by two independent raters whose scores are then combined to calculate the total essay scores. The essay raters are trained using the actual papers of students from the current HSPA. All training and scoring are anonymous.

### **12. Is there a single "passing" score on the HSPA?**

No. Students must reach a passing score on each section of the HSPA in order to graduate. If a student fails one or more sections of the HSPA, he/she has two more opportunities in the senior year to pass the test. Students must retake only the section(s) of the test not yet passed. Once a student passes a section of the HSPA, he or she does not have to take it again.

**13. How were the passing scores set for each section?**

Passing scores for each section of the test were set in June 2002. Using student performance information from the March 2002 administration of the test, committees of experienced educators recommended the passing scores for each section. With the committees' recommendations, the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, set the passing scores. A procedure called statistical equating is used to make sure that all HSPA tests are at the same level of difficulty as the one administered for the first time in March 2002.

**14. What types of scores and reports will I receive from the HSPA?**

Your child will receive an Individual Student Report that contains his or her scores in Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics. For each section of the test, there will be a total score and subtotals for all the clusters of skills. The total scores will be reported in one of three proficiency levels—Advanced Proficient (pass), Proficient (pass), or Partially Proficient (fail). Scores that fall in the Partially Proficient level indicate that a student has not met the minimum level of proficiency required. A copy of this report must be given to you; another copy is kept at the school in your child's file. This report is available only to the student, his or her parent or legal guardian, and school personnel deemed appropriate by the Commissioner of Education.

**15. What happens if my child does not pass one or more sections of the HSPA in the eleventh grade?**

Students who do not pass one or more sections of the HSPA have opportunities to take those sections of the test again. In addition, these students must be given a comprehensive assessment and must be provided with supplemental remedial instruction targeted to their needs. This instruction may be provided in separate remedial classes that meet before, during, or after regular classes, or it may be provided through tutorials, summer programs, or even as part of a student's regular classes. The school must inform you about the remedial instruction your child will receive.

**16. What happens if my child does not pass all sections of the HSPA by the twelfth grade?**

Students who have not passed all sections of the HSPA by the twelfth grade are eligible to demonstrate their mastery of the required skills through the HSPA Special Review Assessment (SRA). In the HSPA SRA process, a team of educators, after examining other evidence, determines whether the student has mastered enough of the required skills to achieve the equivalent of a passing score on the HSPA. The school must consult with you as part of the HSPA SRA process.

Students who do not pass the HSPA SRA or the HSPA will not receive a high school diploma. A student in this situation has one of the following options:

- Return for another year of high school and retake the HSPA;
- Return to the high school at the time of testing the following year and take the HSPA;
- Pass the Tests of General Educational Development (GED).

**17. If my child passes all sections of the HSPA and we move to another school district in New Jersey, must my child be tested again?**

No. The HSPA is a statewide test taken by all public school eleventh graders throughout New Jersey. Scores on the HSPA become part of a student's permanent record and, therefore, the school district must forward test scores to the new school district if the student relocates. Even if a student leaves school and then later returns, he or she would not be tested on any sections of the HSPA previously passed.

## **Your Limited English Proficient (LEP) Child**

### **18. Are the graduation testing requirements the same for LEP children?**

Students who are identified as limited English proficient (LEP) are eligible for an exemption from the HSPA if they meet the following requirements:

- they have not obtained a state-established cut-off score on an English language proficiency test, **AND**
- they have participated for 2 years or less from the date of testing in a program to help them learn English, or they entered New Jersey public schools after the eighth grade.

Your local school district will determine whether your child meets these requirements. If LEP students are exempted from the test, they must instead demonstrate their mastery of the required skills through the HSPA SRA. LEP students who do not choose to be exempted from the HSPA are still eligible for the HSPA SRA if they do not pass the HSPA.

Students who are administered the HSPA SRA in their native language must also pass an English fluency test in order to receive a high school diploma.

## **Your Child with a Handicapping Condition**

### **19. Are children classified as handicapped required to pass the HSPA?**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) defines the graduation requirements, including testing, for each special education student. If a child's IEP does not include a specific exemption from passing any section of the HSPA, then that child must pass all sections of the HSPA as one of the requirements for a high school diploma. Students exempted from passing a section of the HSPA must take the exempted section once. The score on the exempted section will not affect their graduation status.

### **20. Can accommodations or modifications be made to the testing environment to accommodate my special education child?**

Yes. Accommodations and modifications might include such aids as a Braille or large-print version, a different testing site, an extended amount of time for testing, or similar types of accommodations. You should meet with the child study team in your district to discuss necessary modifications for your child. All accommodations and modifications must be specified in your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

### **21. Will the high school diploma my special education child receives be affected by whether he or she was exempted from passing the HSPA?**

No. Currently, there is only one type of state-endorsed high school diploma in New Jersey. If your child meets the requirements of his or her IEP, he or she will receive a state-endorsed diploma.

## **Your Child in a Vocational or Technical School**

### **22. Must my child who is enrolled in a vocational or technical school pass the HSPA?**

Students who are enrolled in vocational and technical programs at comprehensive high schools or who attend shared-time or full-time vocational/technical schools must pass the HSPA as one of the requirements for a high school diploma. Mastery of the skills tested by the HSPA was identified as necessary for all students. These skills are the foundation for all other learning, including vocational and technical skills.

### **23. If my child did well on the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA), why does he or she have to take the HSPA?**

The GEPA tests eighth-grade skills that indicate progress toward mastery of the essential skills that are tested on the HSPA. The GEPA did not directly measure eleventh-grade skills. Therefore, your child's GEPA score cannot substitute for his or her score on the HSPA.

**24. How can I find out whether my child is progressing toward learning the required skills?**

You should speak first to your child's teachers, particularly those who teach mathematics, English, and remedial skills. Other school staff who could help you are the principal, the guidance counselor, the basic skills coordinator, the mathematics or English department chairperson, and the English as a second language (ESL) teacher and/or the bilingual/ESL coordinator if your child is limited English proficient (LEP).

**25. What can I do at home to help my child pass the HSPA?**

Your child's teachers can suggest specific ways for you to help your child. In general, you can help by:

- Showing an interest in your child's work;
- Letting your child know that you have high expectations for his or her work;
- Providing a study area;
- Setting homework and study time every day;
- Asking to see your child's assignments and test results; and
- Making sure your child attends school regularly.

**26. How can I find out more about the HSPA?**

The New Jersey Department of Education has prepared a variety of materials to help parents and teachers prepare students for the HSPA. These materials (this pamphlet, for example) are provided through your child's school. Further information about the HSPA and your child's progress toward development of the skills tested is available at your local high school or district office.

Information about the HSPA is also available from:

**New Jersey Department of Education**

Office of Evaluation and Assessment  
PO Box 500  
Riverview Executive Plaza, Building 100  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0500  
(609) 292-8736 or (609) 292-8739

website: [www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education)